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Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report summarizes the situation of Palestinian women between 1 September 2010 and 30 September 2011, in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2011/18, and provides an overview of the assistance provided by entities of the United Nations system with regard to education and training; health; economic empowerment and livelihoods; the rule of law and violence against women; power and decision-making; and institutional development. The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2011/18 on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, the Economic and Social Council expressed deep concern about the grave situation of Palestinian women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. It requested the Secretary-General to continue to review the situation, to assist Palestinian women by all available means, including those laid out by the Secretary-General in his previous report on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women (E/CN.6/2011/6), and to submit to the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-sixth session a report, including information provided by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

2. The present report covers the period from 1 September 2010 to 30 September 2011 and reviews the situation of Palestinian women based on information from United Nations entities or individual experts that monitor the situation of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

3. Unless indicated otherwise, the report is based on contributions and information submitted by entities of the United Nations system that provide assistance to Palestinian women, including ESCWA, the United Nations country team for the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. The United Nations country team has coordinated contributions to the report by the following United Nations entities: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/ Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Office for Project Services, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

II. Situation of Palestinian women

4. During the reporting period, little progress was made in the efforts to reach a negotiated agreement between Israel and the Palestinians on all core issues which would end the conflict and the occupation that began in 1967. Progress was hampered by continuing low levels of confidence between the parties and in the political process. Direct peace talks began on 2 September 2010 but stalled the following month and have not resumed since. International efforts, in particular through the Middle East Quartet, have continued to encourage the parties to overcome the current obstacles and resume direct bilateral negotiations without preconditions, expecting them to come forward with comprehensive proposals on security and territory. The Secretary-General has called upon both parties to refrain from provocation and to work with the Quartet towards serious proposals on borders

and security in the context of a shared commitment to resume direct negotiations that would lead to an agreement on all final status issues.

5. Amid these developments, the Palestinian Authority continued its efforts to strengthen the State institutions of a future Palestinian State and resumed its efforts towards reuniting the West Bank and Gaza. However, little progress was accomplished in implementing the reconciliation accord of 4 May 2011 between the Palestinian factions, and the internal Palestinian divide continued to restrict the ability of the Palestinian Authority to extend its State-building work to Gaza (see A/66/80-E/2011/111, para. 10).

6. At the beginning of the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly, in 2011 the Palestinian leadership applied for full membership in the United Nations and called upon Member States to recognize a Palestinian State within the 1967 borderlines. The Government of Israel expressed its strong opposition to such Palestinian action (see A/66/367-S/2011/585, para. 13). At the time of the drafting of the present report, the Palestinian application for United Nations membership was before the Security Council. While women have played important roles in promoting peace in the region, few women have been directly involved in the negotiations since the start of the conflict and have also largely remained absent from official discussions on statehood and related actions in the United Nations.[1]

7. On the ground, the overall socio-economic, political and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory remained challenging and continued to adversely affect the situation of Palestinian women. In Gaza, Israel's June 2010 policy decision to ease the closure and further measures taken since brought some limited relief to the population. However, owing to the pivotal nature of the remaining restrictions and the magnitude of the existing challenges, overall, these measures remained ineffective in achieving a genuine improvement in the humanitarian situation.[2] The population of the Gaza Strip remained severely affected by sporadic upsurges of violent conflict between armed Palestinian militants and the Israel Defense Forces, in addition to the continuing closures that penetrate every aspect of socio-economic life. It is estimated that approximately 20,000 girls and boys remain displaced in the aftermath of the 2009 military operation on Gaza, while 80 per cent of households have at least one member suffering from psychosocial symptoms.[1] The West Bank continues to face a protracted crisis resulting from the ongoing confiscation and annexation of Palestinian land, settlement construction, demolitions of houses and livelihood structures, forced evictions, the revocation of residency rights and obstructed access to land, markets and essential services.[1]

8. During the reporting period, there was an increase in settlement construction, house demolition and evictions of Palestinian families. A total of 544 structures in Area C of the West Bank and East Jerusalem were demolished, marking a significant increase from the previous year. Among the structures demolished were 180 residences, resulting in over 980 people displaced, including approximately 525 children. Overall a total of 14,636 people have been affected by the demolitions. Palestinian construction is effectively prohibited in some 70 per cent of

[1] Contribution of the United Nations country team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to the present report.

[2] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Special Focus: Easing the Blockade: Assessing the Humanitarian Impact on the Population of the Gaza Strip* (March 2011).

Area C, in areas that have been confiscated for use by Israeli settlements or the Israel Defense Forces. In the remaining 30 per cent of Area C where Palestinian construction is not prohibited, there are a range of other restrictions that greatly reduce the possibility of obtaining a building permit. As a result, Palestinians needing to build in Area C are often left with no other choice than to build without a permit and risk the demolition of their structures.[3]

9. Palestinian women continued to be victims of violence resulting from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Reports indicate that there was an increase in the indiscriminate firing of rockets, mortars and other munitions on Israel by Hamas and other militant groups as well as in the frequency of Israeli strikes in Gaza, resulting in civilian deaths and injuries (see A/66/80-E/2011/111, para. 13). According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Israeli forces killed three Palestinian women, two in the Gaza Strip and another in the West Bank, and injured 151 others, including 17 in the Gaza Strip and 134 in the West Bank, where there were also 23 women injured by Israeli settlers. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, women sustained injuries, mainly during weekly demonstrations against actions by the Israeli military, clashes between Palestinians and Israeli forces in East Jerusalem and in search-and-arrest operations.[1] This marks an increase in casualties and injuries of women compared to last year during which one Palestinian woman was killed in Gaza (none in the West Bank) and another 86 were injured by Israeli forces and 13 others were injured by Israeli settlers.[4]

10. In the Gaza Strip, OHCHR received information on the increasing intervention by the de facto authorities in the restriction of civil rights and freedoms, including the right to peaceful assembly, and further restrictions on the access to leisure places, including the closure of some of them, under the pretext of mixing of the sexes and non-compliance with the Islamic customs. On 15 and 16 March 2011, two demonstrations in favour of national unity took place in Gaza City. De facto security forces forcibly dispersed the demonstrations, reportedly beating the participants. Over 50 women were beaten by the security forces, including 8 girls, who were briefly detained, beaten with sticks and verbally insulted by approximately 10 security personnel in civilian clothes and police uniforms.[5]

11. As of May 2011, there were still 29 Palestinian women[6] held in detention and prison by the Government of Israel outside the Occupied Palestinian Territory in violation of international humanitarian law obligations. The overall living conditions of Palestinian women in Israeli prisons were reported as unchanged. The conditions in penal institutions in which women were detained, including the poor quality of food, limited fresh air and sunlight, dirty overcrowded cells, were said to contribute to the weakening of the physical and psychological condition of women. Released women prisoners continue to face reintegration problems.[1]

12. Poverty, unemployment and food insecurity rates have remained high. In Gaza, the unemployment rates were at 47.8 per cent for women and 36.2 per cent for

[3] Ibid., *Special Focus: Displacement and insecurity in Area C of the West Bank* (August 2011).

[4] Ibid., Protection of Civilians: Casualties Database, 1 September 2010-1 August 2011.

[5] OHCHR closely monitored the demonstration.

[6] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *The Monthly Humanitarian Monitor* (June 2011).

men.[7] In the period from November 2010 to April 2011, export volumes reached only 5 per cent of the pre-June 2007 levels and no exports have been transferred out of Gaza since May 2011.[8] The exhaustion of commercial opportunities and subsequent devastation of the Gazan economy has meant that many households have lost their incomes, and it is estimated that 38 per cent of Gazans are living in poverty and that 75 per cent of Gazan households are dependent on humanitarian assistance.[9] In the West Bank, the total poverty rate is 18 per cent, of which 9 per cent are considered deeply poor.[10] There is a decrease in real wages by 6.4 per cent, comparing the first half of 2009 to the first half of 2010,[11] while the purchasing power decreased, as the inflation rate increased by 2.98 per cent between the average prices of July 2010 versus July 2011.[12]

13. Even if there was a slight improvement in overall food security, 2010 estimates show that 36 per cent of female-headed households and 33 per cent of male-headed households in the Occupied Palestinian Territory were food insecure. Most of these are chronically food insecure. In the Gaza Strip, the prevalence of food insecurity among both female- and male-headed households was higher, at 48 and 52 per cent, respectively. However, in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, households with a higher number of female adult members are more likely to be food insecure, owing to limited access to job opportunities and lower salaries for women. Overall, female-headed households typically have a lower food consumption score, with 38 per cent having a poor or borderline dietary intake compared to 28 per cent among male-headed households.[13]

14. A significant number of Palestinian women were outside of the formal labour force, engaged in unpaid domestic work, or were working within the informal sector. It is estimated that 38.3 per cent of women working in the informal sector in the Occupied Palestinian Territory are unpaid family members, compared to 9.2 per cent of men.[14] Recent research by UN-Women on the Gaza Strip shows that women

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[7] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Labour Force Survey, 2011", Ramallah, 2011, cited in the contribution of the United Nations country team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to the present report.

[8] WPF, *World Food Programme, Occupied Palestinian Territory Situation Report*, May-June 2011, available from www.ldf.ps/documentsShow.aspx?ATT_ID=4251.

[9] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Fact sheet, humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip (July 2011).

[10] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Poverty and living conditions in the Palestinian Territory, 2009-2010", Ramallah, 2010, cited in the contribution of the United Nations country team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to the present report.

[11] UNRWA, "West Bank labour market: a briefing on the first-half 2010".

[12] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Monthly consumer price index numbers by major groups for the months of January-December 2010 and per cent changes from January-December 2009", available from www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_pcbs/cpi/dd634faf-669e-448b-a96a-3a64cb824f9a.htm; and "Monthly consumer price index numbers by major groups of expenditure for the months of January-July 2011 and per cent changes from December 2010", available from www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_pcbs/cpi/9013200f-427b-464c-a3fe-462ae224a527.htm, cited in the contribution of the United Nations country team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to the present report.

[13] FAO, WFP and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "2010 Socio-economic and food security survey, West Bank and Gaza Strip, Occupied Palestinian Territory" (2010).

[14] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Informal sector and informal employment survey, October-December 2008: main findings", Ramallah, 2011, cited in the contribution of the United Nations country team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to the present report.

play critical roles in securing their households' livelihoods after a decline in income of the male breadwinner. However, the economic burden of the protracted crisis tends to impoverish women even more. Women's contributions to sustain the family's livelihood, such as heavy work on the family's agricultural holdings and liquidating personal assets, such as gold or inherited land, have not strengthened women's status in the community, but have contributed instead to their marginalization.[15] Women's entrepreneurship continues to be constrained by the lack of access to local and international markets. Rural women, especially younger women, of which many live in Area C, face a number of obstacles owing to their isolation and lack of mobility.[16] According to FAO, in 2010, the work of an estimated 40 per cent of rural Palestinian women of working age (15-64 years) was unpaid and unaccounted for in national accounts.[17]

15. Women's health remains another area of concern. The persistence of disease and illness is exacerbated, both directly and indirectly, by persistent obstacles to Palestinian movement, including checkpoints and access to health and other services, such as water and sanitation. The impact of the occupation and the overall insecure situation have contributed to psychological trauma and increased stress among women, men and children. The poor quality of water continues to cause problems of parasites, diarrhoea and skin diseases and it is estimated that over 90 per cent of water in Gaza is unfit for human consumption owing to increased levels of chlorides and nitrates.[18] In the West Bank, over 113 communities, including more than 150,000 women, are not connected to water networks, while those that are connected face frequent severe water shortages owing to depleted springs and wells.[1] In Gaza, hospitals and clinics continue to be affected by severe shortages in medical supplies, power cuts, delays in shipments, overcrowding and insufficient doctor-patient time.[1]

16. Few official health statistics are sex-disaggregated and most are limited to basic morbidity and mortality figures, reproductive health indicators and cancer statistics. According to WHO, chronic diseases such as cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases and cancer, with only slight differences between males and females, were the main causes of death, with breast cancer being the leading cause of cancer morbidity among women. Fertility rates in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in particular in the Gaza Strip, remain high, resulting in the need and demand for related health-care services. Micronutrient deficiencies in the Occupied Palestinian Territory continue to be a major concern, with high rates of anaemia among pregnant women and children. Results of the 2010 Family Survey indicated that more than one quarter of pregnant women were anaemic (26.7 per cent of pregnant women aged 15-49: 39.1 per cent in the Gaza Strip and 15.4 per cent in the West Bank).[19] Access to proper and timely health care can enhance early detection and treatment of disease and improve mother and child health. For example, the

[15] UN-Women, "Who answers to Gazan women? An economic security and rights research" (2011).

[16] Contribution of ESCWA to the present report.

[17] FAO, *Palestinian Women's Associations and Agricultural Value Chains, Rural Employment, Case Studies Series # 2* (Rome, 2010).

[18] UNRWA, "Promoting long and healthy lives in Gaza" (2011), available from www.unrwa.org/userfiles/2011031723858.pdf.

[19] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Family Survey", Ramallah, 2010, cited in the contribution of the United Nations country team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to the present report.

identified causes of maternal and infant deaths suggest that many of them could have been prevented by more effective antenatal, childbirth and early postnatal health care.[20]

17. Although the overall quality of education available to women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory remains variable, access to and participation in education by women and girls has continued to increase. At present, the Occupied Palestinian Territory ranks in the medium range (76 out of 128) of the Education for all Development Index.[21] During the 2010/11 academic year, girls represented 51 per cent of the total student population. In the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, 31,352 girls (58.2 per cent) and 105,015 girls (48 per cent), respectively were enrolled in UNRWA elementary and preparatory education. However, many challenges remain. In the Gaza Strip, the limited reconstruction of schools damaged in 2009 continues to prevent thousands of boys and girls from accessing basic education. According to UNICEF, overcrowded schools operate on a double-shift basis, stretching their capacity to its limits. The number of adolescents (both boys and girls) falling below their grade level and dropping out of school is on the rise, and only 75 per cent of students continue into secondary school.[1]

18. In Area C, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 18 schools had outstanding demolition orders in August 2011, as a result of the lack of building permits.[22] Access to education is further hampered by Israeli settler violence as well as by restrictions on Palestinian access and movement. An additional factor for remote communities is the high cost of transport to educational facilities. Some families living in isolated locations pay up to NIS 100 per child per month on school transport. Families with several children of schooling age are often forced to choose only one or two, frequently boys, to complete their education, while the others are withdrawn from the system after the primary years. Such factors have led to high dropout rates, particularly among girls.[3] In East Jerusalem, a shortage of over 1,000 classrooms leaves approximately 12,000 children out of the education system. According to UNICEF, many schools in the West Bank suffer from water shortages and lack separate or suitable toilets for girls and boys, a situation that is usually affecting school attendance for girls, especially in secondary school. Progress made with regard to girls' and women's access to and participation in education has not necessarily translated into decent employment opportunities for women. For those with higher education, women's unemployment is significantly higher than men's. In 2011, 39.2 per cent of women with 13 or more years of education were unemployed, compared to 13.1 per cent for men.[23]

19. Although women have played numerous roles within the Palestinian political system and served in key decision-making positions, their formal participation and representation in decision-making, including in governance and legislative bodies, has overall been limited. In the current Government, women represent 20 per cent of

[20] WHO, Health conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan, report by the Secretariat (A/64/27) of 16 May 2011.

[21] UNESCO, *Education For All Global Monitoring Report: The hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[22] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Fact Sheet on Area C of the West Bank*, July 2011.

[23] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Labour Force Survey, April-June 2011", Ramallah, 2011. Press release available from www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/LabourForce_q2e.pdf.

the ministers and 6 per cent of the deputy ministers and they account for 12.9 per cent of the Palestinian Legislative Council. Within all ministries, women comprise 30.6 per cent of the staff. In the ministries of women's affairs and of social affairs, women are the majority, comprising 68.1 per cent and 56 per cent of all staff, respectively. Additionally, women account for 11 per cent of all judges, 12 per cent of all prosecutors, and 11 per cent of all lawyers.[24] In 2010, the first Palestinian woman governor was appointed to serve as Governor of the Ramallah and al-Bireh Governorate. Despite many shared concerns and priorities, the political situation and the split between political factions has contributed to divisions among women and made coordination more challenging, including in terms of formulating common positions by women's groups from the West Bank and Gaza in issues related to the State-building process. On the ground, however, women's organizations have continued to support women and girls from all walks of life, including by providing direct services and empowering women through livelihoods projects; serving as charitable organizations, providing training to the police and security forces to be more sensitive to survivors of violence; and undertaking research and advocating for women's rights and legal reform.[16]

20. The disadvantaged situation of Palestinian women has been exacerbated by weak rule of law and gender-based discrimination that remains embedded in legislation, regulations and policies. The situation is further complicated by the existence of two legal systems in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and the lack of access to legal protection for Palestinian women in East Jerusalem. In addition, the prevailing gender stereotypes and norms continue to limit women's freedom of movement, access to employment, health care and education and the exercise of other human rights.[1]

21. High levels of poverty, unemployment and related frustration have contributed to an increase in tension, and ultimately violence, within families. According to data collected by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the level of domestic violence against women and girls in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is high.[25] At present, there is no specific law on domestic violence in place, and there continues to be a critical lack of systems capable of preventing violence, protecting victims and prosecuting perpetrators. In addition, the fear of stigma, social exclusion and retribution, including in the form of more harm, risk of divorce and separation from children, prevent many women from speaking out about abuse.[1]

22. Some positive steps have been taken. On 11 January 2011, the Palestinian Cabinet endorsed the National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women (2011-2019). The strategy, which includes inputs from a range of sources, including women's organizations, civil society, community organizations, the private sector, ministries and women refugees, takes a cross-sector approach, recognizing violence against women as a development issue affecting the social, economic and political systems of Palestinian society. Efforts have also been made to address crimes against women committed under the guise of so-called "family honour", which still continue to occur. On 15 May 2011, in response to one such case in the Hebron area,

[24] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Women and men in Palestine, 2010" (2011). Ramallah cited in the contribution by the United Nations country team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to the present report.

[25] Contributions of ESCWA and of the United Nations country team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to the present report.

the Palestinian Authority President signed a presidential decree removing provisions within the Penal Code that provided for leniency with regard to murder in the name of "family honour", which will come into effect once it is published in the Palestinian Official Gazette.[1]

23. The Palestinian Cabinet, together with the Ministry of Planning and Administrative Development, tasked the Ministry of Women's Affairs to develop a cross-sectoral national gender strategy for the period 2011-2013, with the purpose of placing gender equality and women's empowerment at the core of the 2011-2013 Palestinian National Plan. The three-year Strategy,[26] which was endorsed by the Council of Ministers in January 2011, highlights multiple challenges Palestinian women face and serves as a reference for developing gender-responsive policies that would positively influence the socio-economic and political conditions of both women and men.

III. Assistance to Palestinian women

24. The political and socio-economic insecurity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory continues to have a severe humanitarian impact. Despite some recent macroeconomic improvements, the humanitarian, economic and development needs remain significant. The needs and related priorities, including of women and girls, are reflected in several documents, including the Consolidated Appeals Process for 2011, which set out a strategy budgeted at $575 million, the UNRWA medium-term strategy for 2010-2011, which was estimated at $675 million, excluding emergency relief interventions, and the Palestinian National Development Plan 2011-2013, which outlined priority development needs worth $4.161 billion (see A/66/80-E/2011/111, para. 3). The inclusion of a gender marker in the Consolidated Appeals Process for 2011 and the deployment of an Inter-Agency Standing Committee Gender Standby Capacity Adviser during its development period resulted in significantly higher levels of information related to gender equality in project documents than in the Consolidated Appeals Process for 2010.[1]

25. The present section provides information on efforts made by the United Nations system, in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, donors and civil society, to address the needs and priorities of women and girls. It provides information on assistance provided in six key areas: education and training, health, economic empowerment and livelihoods, rule of law and violence against women, power and decision-making and institutional development.

A. Education and training

26. United Nations entities continued to implement a wide range of initiatives to improve the access of women and girls to quality education and training. These actions include the provision of free basic education, transportation to and from school, scholarships, vocational and literacy training, as well as measures to support a better transition from education and training to women's economic empowerment and job opportunities. In the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, Palestinian girls

[26] Available from www.unwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/UN-Women-oPt-Booklet-Palestinian-Gender-Strategy-2011-en.pdf.

continued to benefit from basic education provided free of charge by UNRWA with strong achievements in terms of gender parity and girls' performance. A total of 24 female students benefited from UNRWA-administered scholarships for universities in the West Bank and 755 female students benefited from technical and vocational training at the Ramallah Women's Training Centre. The UNRWA Gender Initiative provided adult literacy training in Arabic and English to 7,925 women and information technology training to 1,773 women in the Gaza Strip. It also provided mobile literacy support to reach women living in remote areas. Increased efforts were taken to provide graduates of the Gender Initiative with the necessary skills and experience to enter the job market. In the Gaza Strip, the UNRWA relief and social services programme offered work experience and skills training to 1,092 women through women's programme centres, where vocational trainings in areas such as sewing, hairdressing, handicrafts, and information technology literacy were taught.

27. UNICEF increased learning opportunities for at least 100 girls in remote communities in Area C through the rehabilitation of school classrooms. In addition, UNICEF offered after-school learning and recreational activities in adolescent-friendly centres to 6,000 adolescent girls in marginalized areas in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip. OHCHR, together with UNICEF, the Education and Protection clusters and with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education worked to improve girls' access to education by providing school transportation for isolated Bedouin communities in the Bethlehem and Hebron governorates, thus reducing the dropout rate and allowing the safe access of female students to education.

B. Health

28. The United Nations system continued to provide a wide range of health services to Palestinian women and girls. In its effort to increase access to health care across the West Bank, UNRWA established five mobile clinics, which provided regular preventative and curative health care for 13,000 Palestinian patients facing restrictions on their mobility, 66 per cent of whom were women and children. UNFPA continued to support two multi-purpose women's health centres providing a holistic range of services, including clinical services, legal advice, counselling services on gender-based violence, psychosocial support, physiotherapy, gymnastics, and health education to 20,000 female beneficiaries living in heavily populated and underprivileged areas in Gaza (Jabalia, Bureij) and the West Bank (Hebron).

29. UNRWA, WHO and UNICEF implemented various measures aiming at improving maternal and child health. In the West Bank, UNRWA provided antenatal care to 7,893 pregnant women, post-natal care to 5,593 women and family planning services to 23,731 women during the first two quarters of 2011. In the same period 9,453 women were referred to hospitals where they received advanced treatment. In the Gaza Strip, the number of pregnant women receiving antenatal care reached 24,750 and all 8,187 deliveries over the first half of 2011 received post-natal care. Pregnant women and nursing mothers living in isolated rural communities in the Gaza Strip, including Bedouins, benefited from home medical visits provided by UNRWA. Following the expansion of a WHO project to ensure quality maternal and newborn health in the six hospitals in the Gaza Strip, the rate of early discharge for

mothers was reduced, thereby improving post-natal care and reducing risk to women and newborn babies. Additionally, WHO has begun piloting a programme to increase the midwifery capacity among health-care professionals. To address rising micronutrient deficiencies among women and children, UNICEF launched the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative to promote infant feeding practices among mothers. Additionally, UNICEF is supporting a national micronutrient survey to accurately monitor the micronutritional status of women and children.

30. A range of psychosocial services were also provided. For example, from October 2010 to June 2011, a total of 29,281 beneficiaries, of whom 62 per cent were female and 37 per cent below the age of 18, received counselling through the UNRWA community mental health programme. Over that same period, 86,937 refugees, of whom 58 per cent were female and 50 per cent were below the age of 18, benefited from community-based group activities and awareness sessions in the area of mental health. In December 2010, WHO held a workshop on the topic "Child and maternal mental health in the Gaza Strip", which brought together local academics and mental health professionals to address ways of integrating mental health into existing services, with a particular focus on the impact of military attacks on the mental health of women and children. Each month, approximately 2,000 girls and 1,000 mothers benefited from protection and psychosocial services in 20 family centres supported by UNICEF across the Gaza Strip, aimed at strengthening their coping skills. In addition, group and individual counselling benefited hundreds of children and their caregivers in affected communities in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

31. UNICEF provided approximately 28,000 girls in 40 primary schools in the Gaza Strip with improved access to safe drinking water through water tankers. The rehabilitation of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in 27 schools is expected to improve access to safe water and sanitation for roughly 14,000 girls and 550 female teachers. The continued rehabilitation of water networks in the south of the West Bank resulted in 3,000 women and girls and their families having access to safe drinking water through water networks for the first time.

32. Within the framework of a five-year HIV joint programme implemented in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, UN-Women presented the research on the topic "Exploring dynamics and vulnerabilities of HIV transmission among sex workers in the Palestinian context" at the High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on AIDS, held in New York in June 2011.

C. Economic empowerment and livelihoods

33. Socio-economic indicators confirm the continuing need to invest in economic empowerment, livelihood and food security. Assistance by United Nations entities in this area includes different forms of financial assistance, capacity-building, emergency job creation as well as direct food assistance. Female-headed households continued to be a specific target group for many entities.

34. UNRWA remains one of the main employers of women, particularly in the extremely limited labour market of the Gaza Strip. In addition, UNRWA offers women short-term employment opportunities through its emergency job-creation programme. Between 1 September 2010 and 31 July 2011, a total of 17,424 women in the West Bank received work through the programme. Tools, materials and

equipment, such as sewing machines, fabrics and thread for the production of embroidery items were provided to participating women's centres all over the West Bank. In the Gaza Strip, as of mid-August 2011, women held 6,840 out of a total of 24,317 positions created through the programme. Through the "women-run school canteens" project, funded by Norway and in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, UN-Women has been able to continue to provide women's centres with a sustainable income. By preparing the meals for the school canteens, 26 women's centres have become financially independent, are providing an income for the women working with them and are also providing healthy meals to the schoolchildren.

35. To provide short-term poverty alleviation, UNRWA continued its efforts to offer relief to special hardship cases in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, including through cash assistance. A high number of the beneficiaries were female. In addition, UNRWA provided emergency cash assistance for shelter repair to female-headed households in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. UNRWA also implemented various measures to support longer-term livelihood strategies, including through the provision of financial services. From 1 September 2010 to 31 July 2011, 14 per cent of the loans in the West Bank were given to women clients. During the same period in Gaza, UNRWA disbursed a total of 1,071 business loans to female beneficiaries, amounting to $1,379,700 and a total of 167 non-business loans valued at $574,100 to support the housing and consumer needs of female-headed households. With a special emphasis on women-headed households, UNDP/Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People strengthened activities under the Deprived Families Economic Empowerment Programme, which works to improve the living conditions and economically empower the most deprived Palestinian families, through accessing a package of financial and non-financial services. It is estimated that 1,400 women benefit from the 35 per cent of projects run by women under the Programme.

36. ILO, UNDP, UNESCO and UN-Women provided various forms of capacity-building, technical and other support to promote the economic empowerment of women. ILO, in cooperation with the Union of Cooperative Associations for Savings and Credit, provided members of 40 women-only cooperatives across the West Bank with grants, training and technical assistance. ILO also piloted a capacity-building programme targeting over 200 Palestinian women microentrepreneurs to introduce and showcase the ILO Gender and Entrepreneurship Together (GET Ahead) training methodology. In addition to enhancing employment opportunities for women, this ILO initiative served the broader purpose of building the capacities of business development service institutions to provide gender-responsive services. Through the Joint Programme on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, run by the Millennium Development Goals Fund, UNESCO, UNDP and UN-Women have supported initiatives such as the community-based production and marketing of arts and crafts by women artisans and women's involvement in ecotourism.

37. FAO has continued its work to improve food and economic security through projects targeting female-headed households. Activities include home gardens, livestock units, aquaculture, food processing, marketing, improving water management and support to women associations. Approximately one third of FAO beneficiaries in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are women. Women and food-insecure female-headed households are a primary target group of the FAO three-year

Plan of Action (2011-2013) for the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Female-headed households are also an explicit target group for WFP in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip and are prioritized throughout all food distribution programmes. Some 35,651 women had a ration card from WFP in the reporting period. In most cases, they are also targeted by complementary interventions such as cash assistance. Food assistance provided by UNRWA reached 10,244 female-headed households in the West Bank and 7,650 in the Gaza Strip.

D. Rule of law and violence against women

38. During the reporting period, United Nations entities continued to promote women's access to justice and implement a range of measures to address violence against women. Through its Rule of Law and Access to Justice Programme, UNDP/Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People supported civil society organizations providing Palestinian women with legal aid and assistance, including in divorce cases, and, in conjunction with the Palestinian Bar Association, supported the establishment of a network of female lawyers. Additionally, women going through divorce benefited from a financial assistance programme administered through the Palestinian Maintenance Fund. UNRWA provided legal advice and support to 3,341 women through legal advice bureaux based in women's programme centres. A range of awareness-raising classes on cultural, health and social issues were also provided at these centres. OHCHR undertook many activities to promote women's rights in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, including public information and awareness-raising activities and training on relevant standards of international human rights law and international human rights procedures for staff of women's rights organizations.

39. The United Nations Office for Projects Services designed and constructed a gender-sensitive prison and detention facility in the West Bank, allowing female inmates full movement and use of facilities, while providing privacy and separation from male prisoners. This marked significant progress in the care and rehabilitation of female inmates in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. UN-Women provided a full support package of regular weekly social, psychological and legal assistance to women inmates in the three Palestinian reform and rehabilitation centres, which included primary need goods to female inmates with newborn babies. In conjunction with the Independent Commission for Human Rights, UN-Women helped to ensure the reporting of violations against female inmates, improved monitoring of inmate conditions and the filing of complaints or requests for actions to the relevant authorities.

40. On behalf of several donors and the Ministry of the Interior, the United Nations Office for Projects Services also implemented the expansion of a police training centre in the West Bank, which has resulted in a comprehensive and modern training facility for almost 600 cadets, including both male and female students. Special consideration has been given to the gender perspective in all new buildings, with a particular emphasis on dormitory buildings, the learning centre and the gymnasium to ensure the equal participation and education of female cadets.

41. Various entities, including OHCHR, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNRWA and UN-Women, continued to implement various initiatives to raise awareness and enhance capacity among practitioners to prevent and respond to violence against

women. UNFPA developed guidance and provided training to social workers and health-care providers on ways of responding to the needs of victims of violence and implemented awareness-raising initiatives targeted at groups such as rural women and religious leaders. UNRWA organized capacity-building workshops for their health-care staff to help them to identify and address cases of domestic violence in their health centres. Capacity-building workshops on the prevention of domestic violence were also held for community members in refugee camps and for community-based organizations. UN-Women supported a public awareness campaign that included daily radio features, and awareness-raising workshops reaching 2,051 people in the Gaza Strip. Within the framework of the "16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence" global campaign, United Nations entities supported the organization of festivals to combat violence against women in Ramallah and in the Gaza Strip, attracting more than 600 and 700 people, respectively.

42. A range of initiatives aimed to increase the access to services for women and girls survivors of violence. For example, acting under the umbrella of the Ministry of Social Affairs, UN-Women continued to support the Mehwar Centre in Bethlehem, the first multiservice centre providing shelter, psychosocial counselling, health, legal aid and empowerment opportunities. Building on this experience, a new multi-purpose centre — the Hayat Centre — was established in the Gaza Strip. UN-Women also continued to support the Sawa Helpline for survivors of violence against women. UNRWA established family and child protection committees in nine refugee camps in the West Bank to bring community representatives, leaders and organizations together with the UNRWA health, education and social services departments to lead the implementation of a comprehensive multisectoral approach to combating violence against women. Efforts are also under way to develop referral systems for women victims of violence. UNRWA established five one-stop centres providing health services, legal advice and psychosocial counselling to survivors of violence and UNRWA frontline staff are being trained to refer and counsel survivors of violence. UNFPA continued to support three community-based coalitions that provide psychosocial counselling and help in establishing various community-based initiatives focusing on women's empowerment.

43. A number of entities provided institutional support to efforts to address violence against women, including domestic violence. This included support by UN-Women to the development of the National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women (2011-2019) and support by UNDP/Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People and UNFPA to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics to implement the 2011 Palestinian Domestic Violence Survey, which will provide key baseline information for policy, planning and tracking of progress in addressing domestic violence. UNESCO organized a series of training workshops for approximately 400 women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including parliamentarians, on analysing data and statistics on violence against women, which resulted in the development of an action plan by participants linked to the National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women (2011-2019). ILO contracted the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and the Birzeit University Institute of Women's Studies to jointly conduct a study on the gender dimensions of violence in the world of work.

E. Power and decision-making

44. A number of United Nations entities implemented activities such as workshops, trainings and awareness-raising initiatives to promote women's participation in decision-making and leadership. UNDP/Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People organized a two-day workshop in July 2011 to support dialogue on the kind of State that would best deliver to women, which linked together women from all over the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The aim of the workshop was to give Palestinian women a space to voice their concerns and opinions on a future Palestinian State, to learn from experiences of women in State-building efforts in other transitional societies, and to propose approaches that women could take in the coming months to ensure that their opinions are reflected in public debates. In the Gaza Strip, UNDP provided training in leadership, empowerment and entrepreneurship to 52 women leaders of the administrative committees of community-based organizations. UN-Women, in partnership with the Women's Affairs Technical Committee, organized awareness-raising activities on women's political participation and leadership for 1,136 participants representing a cross-section of civil society groups.

F. Institutional development

45. A number of United Nations entities, including ILO, FAO, UNDP/Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People, UNESCO, UNFPA and UN-Women have continued to support various ministries, such as the Ministries of Women's Affairs, Agriculture, Social Affairs, Labour, Culture and Youth and Sports, to mainstream gender perspectives into their areas of work and improve the monitoring of progress in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, including through sector-specific technical support, the secondment of gender equality experts in ministries and efforts to improve capacities for gender-based analysis and data collection. As part of the roll out of the implementation of the Cross-Sectoral National Gender Strategy for 2011-2013, UN-Women supported the Ministry of Women's Affairs in the organization of its first ever international donor meeting with the aim of seeking support for the implementation of the three-year strategy.

46. ILO organized rounds of training and extensive participatory gender audits, after which the creation of a national audit team was announced by the Ministry of Women's Affairs. The team will continue to work through action plans, developed in consultation between ILO and its tripartite constituents, thereby effectively addressing the gender gaps detected in the audits.

47. ILO also assisted in the establishment of a national women's employment committee. The committee, which was endorsed by the Minister of Labour on 24 March 2011, will assist the Ministry of Labour and social partners in implementing specific measures to promote women's employment and their protection in the workplace. In July 2011, ILO met with the Minister of Labour to follow up on a study entitled "Review of labour laws to promote women's labour force: a legal analysis and recommendations for promoting gender equality", conducted in 2010 in consultation with the Ministry of Labour and the national women's employment committee. The study puts forward suggestions for future revisions of the Palestinian Labour Law.

48. Both UNDP/Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People and UNFPA supported enhanced attention to gender equality and youth priorities and the engagement of young women in decision-making. UNDP/Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People worked closely with the Ministry of Youth and Sports and local civil society organizations to support the drafting of the Palestinian Youth Sector Strategy 2011-2013 Document, including by ensuring the active participation of young women and men from the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip in the process.

49. The UNESCO Palestinian Women's Research and Documentation Centre provided training to women leaders of organizations in developing indicators to measure organizational effectiveness and supported the Ministries of Women's Affairs and Culture in the development of gender-sensitive indicators. In addition, 21 participants from the gender units of different ministries were provided training in gender issues as well as management, planning, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation.

50. Initiatives targeted at the United Nations system were also implemented. For example, the UNRWA Gaza Women's Committee has provided services and training to women employees to improve their day-to-day work life and assist them in exploring future opportunities to develop themselves professionally. UN-Women continued to provide technical assistance and gender training to other United Nations entities working in the Occupied Palestinian Territory on ways to mainstream gender equality perspectives at all stages of programming and policy formation.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

51. **The overall political, humanitarian, security and socio-economic situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory remained challenging. The stalled peace process, escalation in tensions between the parties, increased settlement activity, the internal Palestinian divide and continued outbreaks of violence are causes of serious concern. Improving the situation of Palestinian women remains closely linked to efforts to find lasting peace. It is critical to ensure Palestinian women's full and equal participation in conflict-resolution and mediation efforts as well as in the statehood dialogue, so that they, along with men, shape the future direction of their society in accordance with the global commitments set out in instruments such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009) and 1960 (2010).**

52. **During the reporting period, United Nations entities continued to assist Palestinian women and girls in a multitude of ways, including by providing education and health, improving access to safe water, creating employment opportunities, including emergency employment, supporting their longer-term livelihood and economic empowerment through financial and other measures, such as training and capacity-building, and by improving food security. Female-headed households continued to be a main target group for many entities. The United Nations system has also assisted in efforts to strengthen institutional and policy development and the rule of law and, in particular, to improve the prevention and response to violence against women. Access to basic**

services, however, is still inadequate for all Palestinians, in particular women and girls, and high levels of unemployment, poverty and insecurity persist. Continued support and increased investment across all these areas remain a critical need.

53. **Over the past year, important achievements have been made in policy development. The launch of the Cross-Sectoral National Gender Strategy for 2011-2013 and the National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women (2011-2019) and the initial steps taken to implement them are encouraging. These strategies serve as important tools to address the urgent needs and priorities of women and girls, to tackle gender-based discrimination in law and in practice, to prevent all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, and to protect women and girls from such violence. Promising work was also undertaken to bring more attention to gender equality issues in the development of the 2011-2013 Palestinian Youth Sector Strategy Document and in discussions regarding revisions of the Palestinian Labour Law. The effective implementation of these strategies requires sustained political commitment, technical support and financial resources.**

54. **Socio-economic indicators reveal that there is a serious need to continue to invest in women's economic empowerment, livelihood and food security. Women's economic empowerment is a necessity for women's political empowerment but also for the overall development and growth of the Palestinian economy and society. The Palestinian Authority, United Nations entities and other stakeholders should continue to develop and implement measures in support of women's access to and control over resources, training and the creation of employment opportunities for women.**

55. **Enhanced efforts should be taken to systematically incorporate information on the situation of women and girls in studies, reports and briefings by the United Nations system and by independent experts related to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and this information should also be brought to the attention of the relevant intergovernmental bodies. It is also essential to continue efforts to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations system to incorporate gender equality perspectives into the planning and implementation of assistance programmes to ensure that the different needs, priorities, capacities and contributions of women, men, boys and girls are fully recognized and addressed and the entities continue to provide targeted assistance to women and girls.**